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GST ON FRESH FOOD HARD TO SWALLOW

Australia's largest health union, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) is warning that applying the GST on fresh food and vegetables will lead to higher levels of chronic disease and obesity across the population.

The ANMF's Acting Federal Secretary, Annie Butler, said it was ludicrous that at a time when obesity rates in Australia are growing faster than anywhere else in the world, the Abbott Government is reportedly considering imposing a tax on fresh fruit and vegetables.

"We are extremely concerned about the health outcomes of slapping the GST on fresh food," Ms Butler said today.

"Obesity is reaching epidemic proportions. Australia currently has one of the highest rates of obesity in the world, with a quarter of children and more than 60 per cent of adults overweight. The fact is, we don't consume enough fruit and vegetables now – adding an extra 10 per cent to the cost will simply make fresh food even more expensive for Australians and their families in the long term, particularly for lower income earners and pensioners.

"Rather than encouraging people to eat good, healthy food, a GST on fruit and vegetables will just make it easier for people to tuck into cheaper, processed junk food, demonstrating, once again, this Government's lack of regard for health prevention.

Ms Butler said research from the University of Queensland in 2013 showed that the application of the GST on fresh food would drop the consumption of fruit and vegetables by about five per cent.

"It's estimated this would potentially lead to 90,000 more cases of heart disease, stroke and cancer and could increase health costs by around \$1 billion. Nurses and midwives working at the coalface of Australia's healthcare system, would be faced with dealing with this while funding for their hospitals continues to be stripped away," Ms Butler explained.

"The Government's logic is all wrong. Instead of taxing fresh, healthy food, it should be placing taxes on unhealthy foods, an approach that has now been adopted by several countries around the world in line with the recommendations of the World Health Organisation."

The ANMF, with over 240,000 members, is the professional and industrial voice for nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing in Australia.

ANMF media inquiries: 0411 254 390.